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CHURCH PRINCIPLES

THE REAL ANTAGONIST TO ROMANISM.

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A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF S. PETER,

EXETER,

THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 1851,

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SERMON.

PSALM lxxx., 14, 15.

"Turn Thee again, Thou God of hosts, look down from Heaven: behold, and visit this vine;

"And the place of the vineyard that Thy right hand hath planted: and the branch that Thou madest so strong for Thyself."

THE Text is taken from a Psalm written, as is generally supposed, during the Babylonish Captivity, and is eloquently expressive of the combination of adverse circumstances under which the Jewish Church was then suffering; a captive Church and people; "a strife unto their neighbours, and their enemies laughing them to scorn;" distracted, as is probable, by internal dissensions, and insulted as powerless by external adversaries; "the wild boar out of the woods rooting it up, and the wild beasts of the field devouring it;" all the powers, forms, and principles of evil arrayed against it.

Such was the Jewish Church then, such is the Church of England and the principles of England's Church now: captive, and if not in bondage to heathen masters, yet fettered by the jealousy of the state; checked in her powers of developement; looked coldly on by those, whose highest and truest

interest is to stimulate and direct her expansion; all power of self-government virtually denied; lying exposed and helpless to every enemy, both from within and from without—to the attempts of an intruding Hierarchy—to the weakening assaults of principles eating into its very life, whether in an Erastian or Latitudinarian form; and beyond and above all this, the world and worldly men opposing with a fierce hatred every generous self-denying impulse, and striving to crush every attempt to raise the standard of Christian practice, "fearing the light, and hating the light, because their deeds are evil."

It may safely be questioned, whether our history presents a parallel to the difficulties by which God's Church in this land is now beset; whether such a combination of opposing principles, so powerful in their varied character and intensity of evil, ever before assaulted it; and it is at once melancholy and instructive briefly to state the cause.

The cause, the sole cause, was the revival of the distinctive principles of the Church. That such a revival was from God, no one, I think, can doubt, who remembers the zeal, the energy, the self-denial, the self-devotion, that accompanied it; the learning and the piety which it gathered instinctively, as it were, into its embrace; the enduring monuments of self-sacrifice which will for ever attest the genuineness and reality of the movement; the noble school of Theology which it has, I do not say, created, but recalled to life; and which is yet destined to take

a foremost place in, and bear the brunt of, the impending conflict.

It is sadly true, that the exulting feelings with which many amongst us regarded this movement have been most painfully chilled. It may be, we did not carefully remember, that no religious revival has ever taken place without its drawbacks; and that the transition from an elementary and most imperfect system of Theology, to one having a deeper, broader, and more comprehensive basis, more satisfying the spiritual wants of our mysterious being, could not be accomplished, without the danger of there being zeal without discretion; that learning might not always bring wisdom; and that even sincere and unaffected piety might degenerate into extravagance. Still it was with feelings of sorrowful surprise, that we mourned over the defection from our ranks, of many of those in whom we trusted; of some even, whom many amongst us must have regarded with affectionate veneration, at whose feet we have sat, whose words and works have kindled within us the undying flame.

When we found ourselves separated from such as these, by a gulph which may not be passed, and not only separated from, but in conflict with, them; the spiritual tie that bound us together for ever dissolved, sorrow did indeed fill our hearts. But was it a sorrow that took away hope? ought it in any degree to shake our confidence in Church principles? No! "Let God be true, though every man should prove a liar;" the principles remain un-

touched, however we may lament their unnatural developement.

And there are feelings of a sadly consolatory kind, which mingle themselves allowably with our regret. What has been the effect produced by the change on those who have left us? Is there evidence of conscious peace, of settled, undoubting calmness and repose in the perilous step they have taken? I think not. In the extreme opinions into which some have rushed, so extreme, as even to shock and alarm those to whom they have joined themselves; there are, I suspect, signs of internal disquietude, of an unsatisfied conscience seeking rest in excitement, an excitement which has disturbed the intellect and clouded the judgment. It will be difficult, I imagine, for the succeeding generation to identify the mischievous fanaticism of the Priest of the Oratory of S. Philip of Neri, with the clear, powerful, yet ever over-subtle, intellect of the late Vicar of S. Mary's.

More painful is it still, to mark, as we cannot fail to do, the bitter spirit in which we are regarded by those with whom we once "walked in the House of God as friends." It would seem to be the clinging curse of apostacy to hate those whom it once has loved, with a peculiar intensity; and so strongly has this been manifested, and especially towards one, whose own most solemn and impressive words have assured us of his unswerving fidelity to the Church of his baptism, that we may not uncharitably come to the conclusion, that

morally, spiritually, and intellectually, they have been *worsened* by the change.

We are now at the commencement of a life-long contest, the attempt of the Bishop of Rome to assert and carry into effect the doctrine of the Papal Supremacy. It is, in my opinion, a popular fallacy to regard it either as ill-advised or ill-timed: on the contrary, I believe time, opportunity, and concurrent circumstances, were all selected and acted on with consummate skill; and that even the imperious and arrogant tone was not assumed without a careful, well-weighed calculation of its probable results on the masses of the population, with whom there is ever danger, that pretension may be mistaken for rightful authority.

The Papal Rescript came upon us at a critical period in our Church's history: it followed hard on the effects of a disastrous Judgment, which has no parallel in Ecclesiastical annals: a Judgment in which, all logical sequence, all evidence was almost, as it would seem, set aside, and which ventured even to disregard human language as the interpreter of human thought.

This Judgment shook the Church to its foundations: it shook also, and alas fatally, the personal faith and confidence of many of the Church's members: day after day we heard of sincere and earnest, but mistaken men, precipitating themselves into the arms of the Church of Rome, all from one cause, all fleeing from a Church, unable, as they affirmed, to keep the good thing committed to its trust.

And here I will briefly notice another popular fallacy, namely, that these secessions were the immediate moving cause of the Papal Aggression. I do not believe it: the mainspring of Roman policy, as affecting this country, has ever been the *dread of the successful revival of Church principles.* It skilfully seized on the moment, when discredit (not unnaturally) was cast on those principles: it was the fear of *them* and the dread of *them,* combined with the tempting opportunity presented by the late Judgment, which determined the exact period of the Papal Aggression.

The policy of the Court of Rome is now, as it was in the days of Laud, to whose thorough sincerity and integrity of purpose, however qualified by harsher and sterner features, history is at last according a tardy and reluctant justice. Unscrupulous in the means it employs, ever marked by a disingenuous subtlety, and a wisdom that is not from above, but earthly and of earth, Rome ever strives to defame those whom it most dreads, and will wear any shape, and consort with any allies, that may enable her to work towards her proposed end.

And certainly the Papal pretensions have been attended, for the time, with singular success; the most sanguine Romanist in his wildest dreams, could not have ventured to imagine the unexpected aid which has been afforded them. For how have they been met? Did the governing power of this great country, direct the justly awakened popular

indignation into its proper and legitimate channel? No; it diverted and divided the mighty stream; it called the attention of the common enemy to our unhappy divisions; it paraded, not our strength, but our weakness, before the astonished eyes of exulting Rome.

And what has been the result? At the meetings all the agitation was permeated and vitiated by one great and grievous error. The nominal and real object were not identical. Men met together *nominally* to repel the Papal Aggression, but really and truly to assail, what I in my conscience believe to be, the true distinctive principles of the Church of England, and on which her final safety depends.

When the present excitement shall have wholly subsided, many will look back with sorrowful surprise on the mistake into which they have unhappily been betrayed; they will see, that hardly a single clear, definite, intelligible principle was propounded; it was the spectacle of a disorderly, tumultuous many, making incoherent, aimless efforts in the presence of a small, but compact and well-disciplined body. "Can we doubt that while we have been made a strife unto our neighbours, that our enemies have laughed us to scorn?"

How has the result of this agitation been treated, even by those who called it forth, but as a tale full of sound and fury signifying almost nothing. As far as legislative enactment has hitherto proceeded, it is ludicrously disproportionate to an excitement which threatened at one time to convulse the whole

Empire; and we look in vain, either in popular agitation, or even in Legislative Councils, for the true principle of resistance to an aggression, of which it would be unwise to deny the importance.

The only principle on which Rome can be successfully met, is by *a solemn, deliberate, national denial of the Papal Supremacy;* the repelling an intruding Hierarchy, on the one simple, intelligible ground that the *Sees of England are filled,* and that as in the days of old, anterior to the Papacy, the cry was, within the very walls of Rome, "One God, one Christ, one Bishop," that so it is now: that the law of the Universal Church forbids the co-existence of two Bishops in the same place.

This is the point to which the impending conflict will rapidly converge; all other questions will merge in the question of authority; and most cheering would it have been to us, had our Rulers met the Papal pretensions by a simple appeal to this definite, well-understood principle of the Church of Christ.

For has not the admission of the Papal Supremacy, as of Divine appointment, been to the many the great snare? has it not been the point which, once admitted, left scarcely any other obstacle in the way of reconciliation with Rome? And well it may. Admit it, and all details of the faith, all questions of corruptions and novelties, become of secondary and very inferior importance; it covers and overrides everything; it acts as a blind to any thing that might startle and alarm; it affords an

excuse for putting off to a more convenient season, any disturbing considerations springing from other parts of the Romish system.

This is the question to which the whole contest will speedily be narrowed, and in which we shall have this inestimable advantage, namely, that the Papal Supremacy can only be controverted on the ground of the Divine Institution of the Episcopate. The denial of the one, is the affirmation of the other.

Well may we say, that in this question, "others have laboured, and we shall enter into, and profit of their labours." It has been thoroughly sifted and examined, and the Divines of the 16th and 17th centuries have brought the whole weight of their learning, talent, and laborious research, to bear upon a point which was felt then, as now, to be of the most vital importance.

It is one on which no *new* light can be thrown; the principle, on which it must be determined, is well understood, a simple appeal to the evidence of ecclesiastical antiquity; an argument purely inductive, and by which both parties must consent to abide.

I am aware that one powerful intellect, which once we loved to call our own, has taken a bolder and more hazardous step, and appealed, as if in despair, from the evidence of antiquity to an *a priori* argument based on the necessity of an infallible guide. The measure of success with which he has done so, may well be estimated by the sur-

prise and alarm with which the attempt is regarded by all, but a small party of the Romanists themselves. It is a theory which sacrifices the authority, almost the existence, of the Episcopate, to the one point of the Papacy; involving such a disregard of historical evidence, such a perversion of the judgment by one favourite idea, as will lead the Church student to rank it in the same category with that imaginative reasoning, which has developed the whole system of Roman Mariolatry, from a vision seen by Gregory Thaumaturgus, related, a century afterwards, by Gregory of Nyssa.

Yes, amidst our many and grievous trials, the consolation of the Apostle is ours also: "we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed:" our faith is stedfast still: we may not doubt that we are a branch of the true Vine, a branch that God Himself hath planted, a branch that *once* He "made so strong for Himself." The history of the Reformation teems with marks of God's guardian arm over us, separating us for a great and peculiar work in the economy of the Divine Dispensations. To us were preserved those precious χαρίσματα so closely interwoven with the very life of the Church, Orders and Sacraments, authority to preach the Word, and means to minister to the spiritual life. This is not denied by many high authorities, even amongst the Romanists themselves; they allow our Orders, they deny our mission, a denial which as-

sumes, and takes for granted, the great question on which the whole controversy rests, the Papal Supremacy.

Armed as we are on this point, it is allowable for us to dwell with hope on those signs of life in the Church, which, like gleams of light, edge the dim distant line of the Church's clouded and wintry sky. We have passed through a time of spiritual lukewarmness and indifference; a century of neglect had so paralysed all our energies, that, at the commencement of the present century, all traces of the vigour which characterized the Reformation had departed.

Such is not the case now: the feeble spark has been kindled into a bright and glowing flame. Can it be denied, that with all our drawbacks and hindrances, our position as a Church has improved? Are not Church principles better understood, widely extending themselves, and stirring in the hearts of multitudes the very depths of the spiritual life? Has not the very Judgment which called in question the truth and certainty of the Church's teaching, been the means of bringing out the true definite character of that teaching in so strong and clear a light, that, in an excitement which aroused all the energy and earnestness of the Church, no *body of men* came forward to support the dubious and equivocal light in which it attempted to place the doctrine involved? Here and there individuals may have committed themselves to such an opinion, but no *body of men* hazarded their collective judg-

ment in denying that Regeneration by Baptism was the doctrine of the Church.

The Sacramental system then, which is the very life of the Church, will not, we may trust, be permanently injured by a Judgment universally allowed to have no moral weight; and the thought may well temper the bitterness with which we cannot but regard any attempt to impugn a doctrine, dear to the heart and all the heart's best feelings, consecrated and hallowed to us, by the clear, unvarying testimony of all Christian antiquity.

Nor can it with any justice be affirmed, that the late demonstrations were an evidence of the rejection of Church principles by the members of the Church itself. *The great body of her communicants* shared not "in the madness of the people," their voices were not heard in that "strife of tongues." They, whose religious habits and characters had been formed by the uniform action of Sacramental indwelling grace, shrank, it may be culpably, from a popular tumult, in which things holy and profane were indiscriminately trampled on. Subtract from such assemblies, the avowed Dissenter, the mere political partizan, that large body of people, alas that it must be said, who have no fixed religious convictions, and who are at the mercy of the slanderer and blasphemer, and a small residue will be left, whereby to judge of the religious mind of England: a mind which partakes strongly of the national character, avoiding prominency and display, and quietly and unostentatiously occupied

in the discharge of its duties. I repeat, there has been no condemnation of Church principles by those, whose opinions on such subjects are alone entitled to respect, the *great body of Church communicants.*

We shall do well to remember, that in this our time of trial, Rome is not our only enemy. The revival of the distinctive principles of the Church awakens also the instinctive opposition of the world. This has been, and ever will be, for if faithfully received and acted on, they are to it a constant rebuke. This is the necessary condition of a militant Church; and any religious system which anxiously conciliates popular favour, which disturbs not the smooth, easy current of indolence and indifference, down which the world loves to glide, carries with it its own condemnation. Our path is plain, our duty clear before us; to us is committed the task of vindicating and reasserting the great principles of the Reformation, the principles which distinguish and separate us from Rome on the one hand, and the vague and barren generalities of popular Protestantism on the other. It is a path which craves wary walking, in which both the love and fear of the world will constantly assail us; in which our faithfulness will be tried to the uttermost, in a conflict of which death is the only termination.

Ours is indeed a life-long contest; our lot is cast on a point of time pregnant with events forcing infinite and eternal results. Who shall say what twenty or thirty years hence may be the religious

aspect of this Empire, or what will be the relative position of the English branch of the Church of Christ and her aggressive rival? Certain I am, that there are but too many concurrent causes which strangely help forward the assaults of our active and zealous, but subtle and unscrupulous enemy:—the fear-born jealousy of the state—our own most unhappy divisions—the hindrances to united Synodical action—that general spirit of lawlessness and repugnance to all authority, which in these, it may be the forerunners of the last days, is developing itself throughout the civilized world. Empires are being shaken, old forms and long recognized habits of thought are being weighed and sifted; all things around us speak of impending changes, affecting society in all its relations, all its interests, both temporal and spiritual.

And is it so; are the principles which have interwoven themselves with the very life of our souls, is their truth and vitality to be questioned? Is it possible, that the candle lighted by the Martyrs at the stake, the testimony borne by them, in words, which, as the words of dying men, we would fain hope were of a prophetic character; is it possible that light can be extinguished, those words fall to the ground? Brethren, on us does it depend, on us lies the dread, the almost overwhelming responsibility. The few remaining years of health and strength which many of us have yet to live, the longer space which may be permitted to the younger amongst us, all will be days of conflict,

days of trial and purifying, days of sifting and weighing opposing principles. That sense of secure repose in which our forefathers lived, in which we ourselves, it may be, have too long indulged, must be abandoned now. We need the spirit of him, who, in the Church's time of greatest peril, stood unmoved against an opposing world. Nothing can save us but a stedfast adhesion to Church principles; that peaceful zeal, that calm energy, that tenacity of purpose, which springs from the reality, the depth, the intensity, of our religious convictions.

And be the thought ever before us, that zeal and energy are not by themselves sufficient; these alone may be, and often are, tinged with and marred by earthly feeling. There must be personal holiness, holiness of heart and life; that uniform consistent holiness, which alone can make the varied round of annual service, the ever-recurring discharge of religious duty to which we *must* devote ourselves, a "burden not too heavy for us to bear." This is the great and lasting recommendation of our principles; this it is, which ultimately sways and moulds the hearts and affections of the souls committed to our charge. We must be men of prayer; we must seek God, daily, if it may be, in His temple; no dread of the charge of formalism must hinder us from carrying into outward act our inward convictions of the reverence due to holy places, of the special and peculiar presence of God in Sacraments and Ordinances. We must shew that we live in a

constant sense of the reality and nearness of the spiritual objects of the world unseen.

But even personal holiness is not sufficient. If, Reverend Brethren, we deem it allowable to walk by a less ascetic rule than prevails in large portions both of the Western and Eastern Churches, take we good heed that this our liberty impede not the effects of our ministrations. In whose ears more than ours, should be ever sounding the warning voice of the chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, "Whoso loveth wife, or children, son or daughter, more than Me, is not worthy of Me"? In every parish, *our* families should be the nuclei, the illustration, the living and persuasive testimony to the truth and power of Church principles; should shew forth the intimate connection of the grace of the holy Sacraments with Christian ethics and Christian education. "*Our* sons should be as the young plants, and *our* daughters as the polished corners of the temple," bearing witness to our own truth and sincerity, extending the influence of our principles where our teaching and preaching cannot reach, by a quiet and resistless influence, the influence of example.

Gird we ourselves then, Brethren, for our noble warfare, the battle of the Church against the world. We know that the "friendship of the world is enmity with God," I do not say, we should court, but we must not fear its hatred. Where the presence of God is, as shewn either by the maintenance of principle or by the doctrine of holiness,

there must we expect, that it will be met by the world with a peculiar intensity of hatred. For this we must be prepared; it is but the fulfilment of our Lord's prediction, that truth will be acknowledged by the world, yet hated and despised.

Be it so! What is it to us, if "our own hearts condemn us not, and that God which is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things"? What is it to us, if the world shall hate us, if only "God, even our own God, shall give us His blessing"? Pass but a few short years, and we shall find that the evils we have contended with, are come to a perpetual end; while the good, which, through grace, we may have effected, is imperishable and eternal. Sursum corda! Let us think inwardly and oft of the days of eternity, of the glories that shall be revealed. Let us think of the veil lifted up, the Redeemer's countenance seen, of the "general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, of the spirits of the just made perfect," all gathered together; nothing low or mean; nothing sordid, earthly, sensual, cleaving to them; all that is pure and meek, gentle and attractive, wise and virtuous, noble and commanding, docile and obedient, honest and true, all met together, to form one "seamless robe," "one garden enclosed," "one fountain sealed," "one City of God."

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and One God, be all honour, glory, might, majesty, dominion, and praise, now and ever.

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